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3 May 1965

U N I T E D S T A T E S I N T E L L I G E N C E B O A R D

COMMITTEE ON DOCUMENTATION

TASK TEAM III - FOREIGN PUBLICATIONS

WORKING GROUP ON TRANSLITERATION

Minutes of the Fourth Meeting, 28 April 1965

Members or Their Representatives Present

25X1 CIA - [redacted] Chairman
NSA -
ARMY - Mr. Henry Holz
NAVY - Mr. P. Thomas Koines
AIR FORCE - Mr. Wieslaw Arlet
25X1 CSS - [redacted] Secretary

Others Present

25X1 Mr. [redacted], FDD/CIA
Mr. Frank Shepard, AMS
25X1 Mr. [redacted] NSA
Mr. [redacted], NSA

1. Minutes of the third meeting of the working group were reviewed and approved.

25X1 2. [redacted] indicated that [redacted], NSA, would present a proposal for standardizing Cyrillic-Latin transliteration at this meeting. This proposal suggests a transliteration solution which accommodates the requirements of machine processing by eliminating ambiguities in transliterating Cyrillic and Latin characters. [redacted] stressed that it was not being presented as a panacea; however, it should aid us materially in determining the need for transliteration standards in the Intelligence Community. It also provides a point of view from which to examine the problems of developing a transliteration system and then adopting it as a standard. 25X1 25X1

Group 1
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification.

3. The meeting was then turned over to [redacted] who indicated 25X1
25X1 that [redacted] of NSA were available to provide technical expertise during discussion of the proposed transliteration standard. The attention of the group was directed to the restrictions on dissemination which appear on the cover page of the proposal. [redacted] also indicated 25X1
that the proposal had been completely staffed in NSA and is recommended by that agency as a standard.

4. A synopsis of the proposal, the specific problems it addresses and proposed solutions to these problems were presented. [redacted] stated 25X1
that the proposal is directed at the elimination of logical discrepancies in transliteration which prevent effective and efficient machine processing of intelligence files. He listed four major logical discrepancies as follows: (a) one Latin letter representing more than one Cyrillic letter; (b) one Cyrillic letter having more than one transliterated form depending on its position in the original Russian word or the letter preceding it; (c) single Cyrillic letters being represented by two Latin letters which may or may not be converted unambiguously back to Cyrillic; and (d) one Cyrillic letter being transliterated into four Latin letters, SHCH, which can be mistaken for the transliteration of two other Cyrillic characters, SH and CH. These logical discrepancies exist in the transliteration system employed by the Board of Geographic Names. It was noted that optical character recognition now in research and development would have the same requirements for unambiguous representation in order to be effective and efficient.

25X1 5. [redacted] discussed the characteristics of chain printers used in association with computers and modifications being developed by IBM to expand the character sets of these machines. This includes development of chains containing "preferred" characters which are repeated more frequently on the chain than "non-preferred" or special characters which generally have low frequency utilization. The expanded character sets and their utilization on an IBM 1403 printer reduce speeds from 1100 lines - per minute to, on the average, 900 lines per minute. Maximum reduction in printer speed which might be encountered was estimated to be a reduction to 550 lines per minute.

25X1 6. [redacted] then described in detail a machine program to convert transliterated Latin letters back to the original Cyrillic letters. He also discussed a series of checks which must be made when BGN-transliterated "Y", "TS", "TSH", "SHCH", "CH", "ZH", and "KH" occur. It was emphasized that even after these programmed instructions have been carried out by the machine there will still be cases where ambiguity remains. It was also noted that a linguist can draw upon his knowledge of phonetics and grammar rules to resolve ambiguities. What a linguist can decide almost at a glance may require hundreds of instructions before a computer can make a similar type decision, if it can do so at all.

7. In part, conclusions reached in the proposal are that a single standard Cyrillic-Latin transliteration system is needed and that such a standard should:

(a) Provide a character-for-character correspondence between Cyrillic letters and their Latin-equivalents as far as possible.

(b) Allow no more than two Latin letters to represent those Cyrillic letters which have no single letter phonetic equivalent in English. These two-letter equivalents should be chosen so that they present no ambiguity when printed in capital letters or by a single case machine such as a teletype set or an IBM 1403 printer.

(c) Retain the maximum number of phonetic equivalents now in use to minimize relearning problems for analysts who will be using the standard system.

8. After some general discussion, [redacted] requested that members read the NSA proposal. Further, he indicated that it would be the subject of detailed discussion at the next meeting which is scheduled for 1000 hours, 12 May 1965 in Room 2E45 at CIA Headquarters. 25X1

[redacted] 25X1

Secretary